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## **Fort Knox closer to changing mission**

New combat brigade would replace Army Armor Center

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ARLINGTON, Va. -- Fort Knox's transformation from an Army armor training center to headquarters for an infantry combat brigade moved closer to reality yesterday.

The nine-member independent Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission voted unanimously to accept the Pentagon's recommendation to move the Army Armor Center and School to Fort Benning, Ga., and to bring an infantry combat brigade to Fort Knox.

"It's good for everybody -- good for the shopping center owner, good for the town, good for everybody," said Johnnie Moss, 60, of Radcliff, whose Book Worm Bookstore is on Dixie Highway about 2 ½ miles from the base.

In other action, the panel voted to send an attack aviation battalion at Fort Campbell to Fort Riley, Kan. But Fort Campbell would get an Armed Forces Reserve Center and the 52nd Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group from Fort Gillem, Ga., which the panel voted to close.

The commission later this week is expected to decide whether to downgrade Fort Knox's Ireland Army Community Hospital to a clinic, move the Army Human Resources Command to Fort Knox, and remove 200 Navy jobs from the former Naval Ordnance Station in Louisville.

Also yesterday, the panel voted to close the Army Reserve Center in Louisville, affecting 43 jobs; to close the Reserve centers in Richmond and Maysville and consolidate them at the Blue Grass Army Depot, affecting 18 jobs; to close two Paducah Reserve centers and consolidate them at the Paducah Airport, provided the Army can buy the needed land, affecting 31 jobs; and to close the Navy Reserve Center in Lexington, affecting nine jobs.

### **Fort Knox's future?**

The moving of the armor school and installation of the combat brigade so lacked controversy that the base closure panel approved the changes within minutes and without discussion early yesterday morning.

The commission staff said the Pentagon met the criteria for making the changes at Fort Knox, and the moves were consistent with the military's long-term plan for reorganizing its forces.

Under the plan for Fort Knox, moving the armor school would take away 7,800 soldiers who annually train at Fort Knox, plus about 2,000 permanently based soldiers and 2,000 civilians. The regional jail also would close, part of a consolidation with the military prison at Fort Leavenworth, Kan.

But the commission also endorsed Pentagon plans to make the Army base home to an infantry combat brigade, which would bring in about 5,000 permanently based soldiers and almost 2,000 civilian jobs.

Fort Knox also would be readied for the relocation of military police, engineer and combat service support units from Korea and Europe.

It also would become headquarters of the U.S. Army Cadet Command and the U.S. Army Accessions Command, both now at Fort Monroe, Va., which the closure panel voted to shut down. The accessions command handles recruitment, basic training and the Army's Reserve Officer Training Corps programs.

Also going to Fort Knox would be the 84th Army Reserve Regional Training Center, now at Fort McCoy, Wis., and the Army Reserve's 100th Division headquarters, now at Louisville's Bowman Field.

### **Some lament loss of armor**

Kentucky officials did not fight the loss of the armor school, announced when the Pentagon released its proposed base closure and reorganization list in May.

"Yeah, we hate to lose the armor school," Rep. Ron Lewis, R-2nd District, said. "But times are changing and the Army is adapting to a new-world order of threats, and the community is going to benefit from these changes."

Lewis said that overall, Fort Knox, which is in his district, would gain under the proposal.

William Paul Smith, 77, a retired Army sergeant major from Mannsville, Ky., also rued the likely loss of the armor school.

"It's been there forever and ever, of course," said Smith, 77. "But if consolidation and everything will save money for the United States government, I think it's a good idea."

Smith and his wife, Goldie, 69, regularly use the commissary and medical services at Fort Knox.

The future of the Patton Museum of Cavalry and Armor at the base is not clear.

Retired Maj. Gen. Bill Barron, executive director of the CORE Committee of the Fort Knox Chapter of the Association of the U.S. Army, said the decision is months away.

He would like to see the museum stay, he said.

## **Boon to economy predicted**

Retired Brig. Gen. Jim Shane, executive director of the Kentucky Commission on Military Affairs, said the moves at Fort Knox will mean an increase in annual salaries of \$254 million and will require more than \$100 million in construction.

"Very favorable for the commonwealth, so we're very pleased with that," Shane said.

Steve Wallace, a broker with Re/Max Executive Group in Elizabethtown, Ky., sees a potential big boost in real estate in the Fort Knox area because the base no longer would be primarily a home to troops quickly passing through.

"That's building a community," Wallace said.

He said he has been getting numerous inquiries from military personnel about home prices in Kentucky.

Moss, owner of the Book Worm and a retired Army sergeant, estimated that about 40 percent of her customers are connected to the installation.

If the facility had been slated to close, she said she would have done the same with the Book Worm.

"Since that announcement was made, two of the empty stores in this particular shopping center have been filled," Moss said.